Summary (As of 1430 Hrs UTC)

As of 24 March, Ukrainian ports are still closed.

Ukrainian officials reported 24 March that a Russian landing ship has been destroyed and that two others have been damaged in the occupied Ukrainian port city of Berdyansk. The Ukrainian military posted footage, reporting that the *ORSK* had been hit by its forces. Details of what caused the explosion and fire on board remain unclear though the incident occurred at 07:00 local time (05:00 GMT) on Thursday. Berdyansk, which is located west of the besieged port of Mariupol, was seized just four days after Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February. Russia has reported that it has used the

Source: Washington Post

port as a base to ferry in equipment for its troops. Russian army TV hailed the arrival of the *ORSK* in Berdyansk last week as an "epic event" as it was the first Russian warship to dock there.

Advisory

MS Risk continues to advise any vessels currently within Ukrainian Ports to leave immediately, if it is deemed safe to do so. Vessels should ensure that they are broadcasting on AIS and clearly state their intentions across VHF. In the event that any vessel is challenged by Russian military vessels, they are advised to comply fully with instructions. MS Risk further advises all commercial operators at this time to avoid any transit or operation within the EEZ of Ukraine or Russia, notably in the vicinity of the Crimean Peninsula within the Black Sea. As of 24 March, the Black Sea ports of the Russian Federation are functioning normally. All transit inbound Western terminals should be made out with Ukrainian and Russian EEZ south of the Crimean Peninsula. While Commercial operations within the EEZ of Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania remain unaffected at this time, the Romanian Ministry of Defence has announced that Russian military vessels are diverting and stopping commercial ships en-route to Ukrainian ports north of Romania's EEZ. Consequently, such vessels are advised to void transiting within 50 nautical miles of the north-east extremity of the Romanian EEZ. Any vessels transiting through this region are advised to maintain close contact with national and local maritime authorities. Any incidents or suspicious activity should be reported via their respective national channels and to the local maritime authorities.

On the Ground

A month into the war and Ukraine is pushing Russian troops back. Russia has claimed to have gained control of the city if **Izyum** in the Kharkiv region of eastern Ukraine, according to Russia's state-owned Rossiya 24 news channel. The Ukrainian administration of the city however has reported that fighting continues. The city of Izyum is located on a key route to the eastern Donbass region and a capture of the city by Russian troops would potentially enable Russian forces in the north-east and south-east of Ukraine to link up. The mayor of Kyiv has reported that almost all of **Irpin** is back in Ukrainian hands. The city has seen fierce fighting in recent weeks. In the southern port city of **Mariupol**, shelling continues with 100,000 people trapped with no food, water or power. While a number of attempts to create humanitarian corridors and agree to temporary ceasefires to allow those trapped in the city to escape have failed, some aid and supplies reached part of the city controlled by Russian forces on 23 March. More than 100 people waited in line for boxes of food and humanitarian supplies being distributed from a lorry. The situation in Mariupol however remains dire, with many people continuing to hide in basements and with President

Zelensky stating earlier this week that there was "nothing left" of the city. An estimated 90% of the city's buildings have been damaged or destroyed. An official who recently fled the city has reported that the port area remains largely intact. Satellite images released on 23 March appear to show that the port has largely been unaffected. Mariupol has effectively become the most heavily bombed and damaged city in Russia's war with Ukraine and it has been key to Moscow's military campaign in the country. While geographically, the city occupies only a small area on the map, it now stands obstinately in the way of Russian forces who have come out of the Crimean peninsula and who are now pushing northeast to try to link up with Russian troops and Ukrainian-separatist allies in the Donbass region. Other cities in Ukraine, including **Kyiv**, **Chernihiv** and **Kharkiv** have also been bombed in recent days. Officials in Ukraine report that Russia has destroyed a key bridge over the Desna river, effectively cutting off a vital route between the northern city of **Chernihiv** and the capital Kyiv. The bridge had been used to bring humanitarian aid to the city and evacuate civilians. According to Ukraine's ombudsman for human rights, "the city has no electricity, water, heat and practically no gas, and the infrastructure has been destroyed."

Western intelligence agencies report that Russian troops are growing increasingly demoralized and they risk becoming encircled outside Kyiv. In its latest intelligence assessment, the UK's MoD reported that Ukraine is continuing to carry out "successful counter attacks" on Russians outside the capital, and that the Ukrainians have probably retaken the towns of Makariv and Moshun. It assessed that "there is a realistic possibility that Ukrainian forces are now able to encircle Russian units in Bucha and Irpin." British military officials also noted that Russian troops along the axis northeast of Kyiv are facing "considerable supply and morale issues," adding, "it is likely that successful counter attacks by Ukraine will disrupt the ability of Russian forces to reorganize and resume their offensive towards Kyiv." Ukraine's military has also claimed that Russia is moving troops to Ukraine's borders after suffering heavy losses during the war. In its latest update on the war, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine reported that "due to suffering numerous losses" Russian forces "continue to form and move additional units of armed forces of the Russian Federation to the Ukrainian borders." It further claimed that "contracting measures have been intensified" by military officials in Russia's western Smolensk region and that "servicemen returning from a business trip from Syria are also being recruited to replenish the occupation units." While this information has so far not been independently verified, NATO officials believe that some 7,000 - 15,000 Russian troops may have been killed in the first month of the conflict, with the number of wounded perhaps between 30,000 - 40,000. Russia has not provided an official death toll since 2 March, when it said that 500 of its troops had died. Ukraine's vice-prime minister has disclosed that the country is using facial recognition software to identify the bodies of dead Russian soldiers and inform their families. Mykhailo Fedorov, who also runs Ukraine's ministry of digital transformation, reported that the country is using technology provided by New York-based company Clearview AI. The service is being provided to Ukraine free of charge, and is not being provided to Russia. Ukraine has also set up an online form for Russians seeking to claim the bodies of the dead soldiers.

Ahead of the NATO meeting on Thursday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, during his nightly address, spoke in English for the first time as he called for global protests as a show of support for Ukraine. NATO leaders held emergency talks on 24 March on the next steps in responding to Moscow's war in Ukraine. The summit in Brussels has been described as one of the most important in the alliance's history. NATO on Thursday pledged more military supplies and cyber support. It said that on land, there will be substantially more forces in the eastern part of the alliance at a higher state of readiness while in the air, more jets will be deployed and at sea, there will be carrier strike groups, submarines and combat ships on a persistent basis. Some 40,000 troops will be moved to NATO's eastern flank in response to Russia's invasion, with NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg confirming that new battlegroups will be sent to Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania. NATO also noted that cyber defences were being strengthened and that it will also help Ukraine defend itself against nuclear and biological threats. During the summit, NATO leaders also agreed to extend Stoltenberg's term as secretary general for an extra year. Stoltenberg has held the position since October 2014.

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About MS Risk

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MS Risk has a dedicated team of researchers, a 24/7 hotline service, and a pool of trained and experienced consultants to support client needs.

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VIRTUAL SECURITY DIRECTOR SERVICE

- For clients lacking a full-time security executive

References are always available.

More information is found at www.msrisk.com

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